

# Productivity, Social IN THE WO



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BY PAUL ASUNDA

**T**he 21st century workplace is being shaped by ever-changing technological innovations, shifting demographic patterns, globalization and power shifts, in addition to different economic players such as policymakers, employers, education and training institutions that shape the quality of the future workforce. In today's work environment, organizations are not only relying on technological innovations, but also on new Internet communications technologies, altered working practices, and improved training of the workforce to improve profits as well as worker productivity.

Organizations operating in this environment are increasingly having a Web presence organizing their services and goods around electronic commerce culture. Working in the 21st century organization will require workers who are competent in using technologies and have a range of skills and expertise to work on common projects. This work environment is giving birth to project teams distributed all over the world that are formed and disbanded as old tasks are completed and new ones identified. In such environments task involvement may last for as little as a day, up to a week, or longer depending on the magnitude of the project.

## Productivity and the Workplace

The 21st century workplace is one that is driven by technology, and its success is noted by productivity growth and the employment rates of its citizenry. Therefore, the affiliation between productivity, technological innovations, and the creation of job opportunities is clear-cut for any organization that seeks to be a key player in its business operations. According to Kudyba and Diwan (2002), productivity generally involves economic efficiency; in the business world it refers to generating value-added output through efficient utilization of resources. Generally, an organization's economic success



# Networks and Net Communities

## WORKPLACE

is measured by its output productivity in addition to its workforce efficiency.

Some strategies that have been noted to increase workforce productivity include but are not limited to, (a) capital accumulation through investments, (b) innovative efforts, (c) imitations of world-class practices, (d) enhanced division of work, (e) development of physical and social infrastructure, (f) higher levels of education, and (g) a higher involvement and motivation of workers in the production processes (Kopelman, 1986). In the midst of all strategies geared to enhancing productivity of the workforce, it has been noted that communication is an important element in the equation.

### Social Net Communities and Worker Productivity

Today, social networks and net communities support the disintegration of the vertical structure of 20th century organizations. Consequently, this has allowed coordination across geographically dispersed entities connected through electronic networks. Work products, data and information can be transmitted rapidly and inexpensively, eliminating the need for hierarchical coordination structures. Therefore, individuals who work for these organizations are adapting and constantly learning and applying new ways of streamlining new Internet communication technologies to meet their professional and personal needs. These technologies are now the bedrock of virtual communi-

ties formed through social networks.

Social communities help their users discover, extend, manage and leverage professional and personal experiences online. Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, LinkedIn, Periscope, Twitter, Orkut, etc., are slowly being embraced and interwoven into the workplace fabric, significantly affecting the scope and nature of doing business on a global level, while introducing new opportunities and bringing markets to your desktop. Building on the work of David Teten, who wrote *Virtual HANDSHAKE: Opening Doors and Closing Deals Online*, most social networks could be categorized into two groups—the individual and the enterprise as indicated in figure 1 (page 40), as cited by Reid (2007).

With the increased use of social networks it is evident that the workforce, contemporary organizations and world economies are positioning and strategizing to utilize these communication channels for day-to-day operations to achieve and maximize efficiency and generate profits. However, today the question is not what social networking is, but rather what it means for 21st century organizations and worker productivity. Therefore, do social networks have a place in how we conduct business? Maybe, in the early 1990s a spirited discussion arose on the use of Instant Messaging (IM) in the workplace with its skeptics claiming it was a time-wasting fad that would never last. These ominous opinions and

pessimistic predictions proved unfounded when IM enthusiasts started to use it to conduct business with or without their organizations' approval (Message Labs, 2007). Today, IM is a well-established tool for real-time communication in the workforce in addition to being utilized as a learning tool in distance and online education settings. Can we confidently say social networks will follow suit?

### Will Social Networks Transform 21st Century Worker Productivity

To answer such a question, organizations need to define and understand the 21st century worker in context of the modern workplace. Karoly and Panis (2004) argue that the 21st century labor market is demanding a more skilled workforce whose members are adaptable throughout the course of their careers to changing technology, product demand, and global competition, along with a lesser-skilled services-oriented workforce. With organizations adopting a vertical disintegration approach and outsourcing, if used appropriately social networking tools cannot only help individuals realize their entrepreneurial plans—they can also help business entities and those who work for them organize their workload and life.

Unlike other communication media, social networking sites are attracting masses and do not only provide users with the ability to communicate with each other, they also enable them to find like-minded individuals. When used ef-



**Figure 1. Categorization of Social Networks**

The Individual	The Enterprise
<b>Real-time communications:</b> AIM, Chat, VoIP, SMS, ICQ, Skype, IRC, Net2Phone, oovoo, Dimdim	<b>Relationship capital management software:</b> Contact Network, Spoke Software, VisablePath, InterfaceSoftware, Leverage Software
<b>Contact data management:</b> GoodContacts, Plaxo	<b>Social network analysis and knowledge management:</b> Tacit, Entopia
<b>Blog software, RSS and services companies:</b> Six Apart, Technorati, Urchin, Feedburner, Newsgator, Pheedo	<b>Job referral networks:</b> Accolo, Jobster, H3.com, LinkedIn, Monster
<b>Business-focused social network services:</b> LinkedIn, OpenBC/Xing, Ecademy, Ryze, ZeroDegrees	<b>Blog software:</b> RSS, Blogspot, WordPress
<b>Event and meeting facilitation:</b> Meetup, Evite, Cvent, oovoo	<b>Biographic analysis and people search:</b> Zoominfo, Spokesoftware, Jigsaw, LinkedIn
<b>Tagging, social bookmarking and folksonomy tools:</b> Social Text, Wikia, JotSpot (acquired by Google), Twiki	<b>Enterprise social network software:</b> IBM, Connectbeam, Haystack/Credo

Source: [www.infotoday.com/searcher/jul07/reid\\_grey.shtml](http://www.infotoday.com/searcher/jul07/reid_grey.shtml)

fectively, social networking sites can, for instance, enable marketing professionals and customer service agents to develop meaningful relationships with customers in new ways. So is social networking the latest weapon to get more customers and increase organizations' economic productivity and position young entrepreneurs to self-employment?

For such a trend to take root employers will have to allow employees to use these sites, ensuring that they do so without subjecting themselves or the organization to unwarranted risk. Those using these sites will need to know that it takes only one employee to use a social networking site injudiciously for the repercussion to be significant.

## Benefits of Social Networks in the Workplace

Some of the benefits of social and business networking sites include:

### Networking, Collaboration and Information Sharing

Social networking sites provide a platform where individuals share information and create communities of practice. Through these sites members have the benefit of access to everyone's thoughts when solving a problem. Further, individuals can use these sites to maintain business contacts and introduce colleagues to one another.

### Marketing

With heavy online traffic these sites are opening up new marketing opportunities for businesses. The online MarketingVOX (2006) company documented on its Web site that one in 20 Web visits go to social networking sites. Further, with low advertising rates, they are attracting marketers of consumer goods and music; recently Facebook increased the number of cities available for adver-

tisers to target when creating new ads online (O'Neill, 2010). However, the key to increased productivity is to keep customers engaged and offer what they want.

### The 1990s and 2000s Generation

Social networks play a very important part in the lifestyle of the Millennial generation. Access to social networking sites is important to this generation as is using their mobile phone and text messaging. Preventing these employees from using all the technology tools in their possession will only lead to disgruntled, unhappy workers. By contrast, giving them regulated freedom to use these sites in the workplace may help both employees and the organizations they work for achieve efficiency and increased productivity (Marshall 2008).

### Looking Ahead

Social networks are tools to help individuals in the workforce organize their workload and life; workers entering the workforce will need to be competent in using these technologies to be successful in the workplace. What makes the difference is how they use them and for what. When appropriately used and integrated into an organization's business plan and model they enable the business entity and its employees to:

- Increase customer satisfaction via timely responses to customer inquiries.
- Facilitate communication between customers and experts to share knowledge in areas of interest.
- Find experts within the organization as well as those outside with similar interests.
- Provide the whole product to fully meet a customer's needs since customers can easily customize their wants.
- Understand and visualize real communication paths within an organization and entire business process transaction.
- Extend the shelf life of conferences



and organization meetings with an online network of attendees and database. **1**

### Explore More

A list of available social networks and a video demonstration of how people in the workforce are using these tools can be accessed online.

List of Social networks at Wikipedia:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_social\\_networking\\_websites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites)

Video Demonstration:  
<http://whatmatters.mckinseydigital.com/flash/collaboration/>

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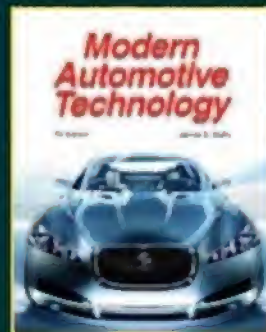
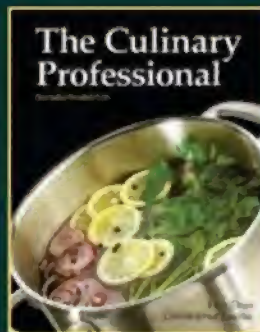
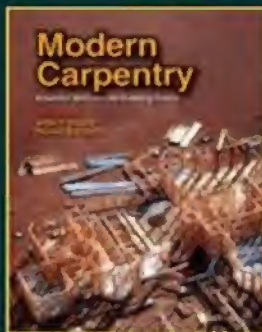
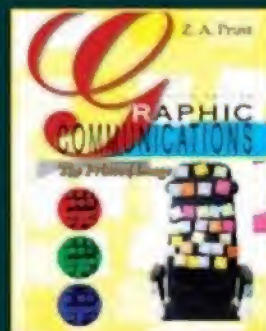
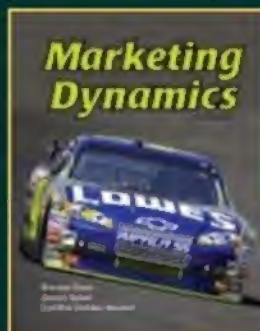
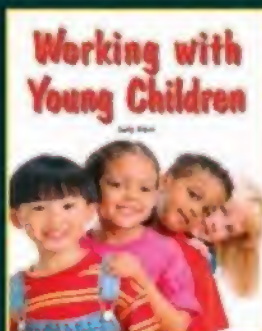
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